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The Tomcat Wins Its Toughest Dogfight-
Bureaucratic Politics Saves the F-14D

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The Tomcat Wins Its Toughest Dogfight--
Bureaucratic Politics Saves The F-14D

The Navy's procurement program for the Grumman F-14D fighter is alive today, albeit it has a terminal disease. The FY-90 defense budget funds eighteen Tomcats, but the appropriation legislation includes a "poison pill" statement which terminates the production when the eighteenth aircraft rolls off the line. How did the \$1.3 billion procurement program get resurrected in the congressional budget process after it had been cancelled by the Department of Defense to meet a White House - Congress agreement on defense cuts? Bureaucratic politics saved the F-14D and gave it another life.

President Reagan's lame-duck budget, sent to the Hill in January 1989, included funding for twenty-four F-14D's. The five year DOD plan projected a total buy in excess of one hundred aircraft. In April, however, Defense Secretary Cheney cancelled the F-14D under congressional pressure to reduce by \$10 billion the FY-90 defense budget he inherited. He proposed instead to upgrade existing F-14's to the more capable "D" configuration. Cheney's decision ignited an intense debate in congress in which officials clashed, interest groups were mobilized, alliances played heavily, and deals were struck. Cheney was fighting to establish his authority to control the DOD budget; Congress was fighting to exert their independence on budget issues and to save Grumman Aircraft. The House defeated Cheney's proposal and reinstated the aircraft; the Senate sustained his decision. The final funding decision was a compromise, politically engineered by a joint conference committee. It was by no measure an optimum solution. None of the parties could claim total victory, but all could say they didn't lose.

The F-14D debate is a great case study in bureaucratic politics. My objectives in this essay are to reconstruct this debate and, using the bureaucratic model, to analyze the

decision-making process from the bureaucratic politics perspective.

II

The Bureaucratic Politics Model

The bureaucratic decision-making process rarely produces finite or rational solutions to problems. Decisions rather are political outcomes, the products of compromise, coalitions, competition, and conflict. The process is a game of maneuver and political bargaining. The players, the decision-makers, pursue their own and their institution's interests. They wield unequal power and influence. The game is played in an arena often described as structured like a target with the central players on the bull's eye and the other players surrounding them in concentric rings. The boundaries separating the players are transversed by action channels. Access is vital. The stakes of the game are high - the players play by the rules, but they play hard-ball. Influence, power, personality, and position are important determinants in the process.

The bureaucratic politics paradigm has many fundamental principles:

- 0 Decision-makers see different faces of an issue.
- 0 Where you stand depends on where you sit.
- 0 Key players hold critical organizational positions.
- 0 Positions define what players can and can't do.
- 0 Position determines a player's power.
- 0 Players bring bureaucratic baggage to the game.
- 0 Organizational parochialism influences the players.
- 0 Games often are complicated by hidden agendas.
- 0 A player has only so much power capital to expend.
- 0 No one player is decisive.
- 0 Alliances, coalitions, and lobbies are critical.
- 0 Rules, strategies, and tactics play significantly.

III

The F-14D Compromise - Chronology and Arenas, Players- Their Interests And Stakes

The Chronology and Arenas. The decision-making process which produced the F-14D decision played-out over the course of eight months. It was driven by schedules and deadlines, in particular by the budget legislative process, as most bureaucratic processes are. The decision arenas shifted, often overlapped, but in general the process flowed sequentially from within DOD, to the House, to the Senate, and finally to the conference committee. Like all battles the process produced a chronology of significant events and decisions:

- April 14.** Secretary Cheney cancels the program. Navy is given three days to reclama.
- April 23.** Congressmen from Long Island weigh-in to support the aircraft on behalf of Grumman.
- April 25.** Secretary Cheney defends his decision before the House Armed Services Committee.
- June 15.** Rep. Aspin, HASC chairman, in a surprise move announces his support for Cheney's decision.
- June 28.** Aspin fails in the HASC. The committee votes \$1.3 billion for 12 aircraft in FY90 and 12 in FY91.
- July 13.** The Senate Armed Services Committee supports Cheney and votes to kill the F-14D.
- July 27.** The House votes 261-162 to approve a Pentagon budget that includes the F-14D.
- Aug 2.** The Senate votes 95-4 to approve a defense budget without the F-14D.
- Aug 23.** Cheney calls the F-14D a jobs program for Long Island.
- September.** The conference committee debates the conflicting bills.
- Oct 26.** The conference committee votes a compromise - 18 F-14D's will be funded in FY90, but production will end with the last aircraft.

Players - Their Interests and Stakes. Bureaucratic politics is a game of conflict between opposing players, coalitions, and alliances. The process is rarely steady-state. Dynamics are introduced as players thrust and counter-thrust to advance their arguments and pursue their interests; as the relative power and influence of the players change; as players modify their stands on the issue to reflect interim decisions; as chips are cashed and bargains struck; and, as stakes are won, lost and re-evaluated. Who were the main players? What were their interests? What were the stakes they played for?

OSD. This was Secretary Cheney's first bureaucratic battle as the Secretary of defense - he had been in office less than thirty days. He was facing real budget pressures and he was taking over a department that had been adrift during the lengthy Tower confirmation debate. Cheney faced tough, time sensitive choices. He could stonewall Congress as his predecessor had done, or he could seize the initiative and champion his own set of budget reductions. He chose the latter option. Cheney was undoubtedly committed to lowering the budget; his political instincts could easily recognize the inevitable. But at stake were his credibility with congress and his authority as the top man within DOD. Both were more important issues in the long term.

DON. The Navy was without a civilian leader, Secretary Garrett had yet to be confirmed. The ball was in the service's court and one of their "sacred cows" was under attack. However strong the ACNO's for air warfare arguments were, they did not prevail. The bureaucratic politics paradigm would argue that, without a supportive SECNAV, the service was disadvantaged - a Lehman could have made a difference. In addition, the ACNO was forced to balance two significant and interrelated interests, the F-14D and the Advanced Tactical Fighter (ATF). At stake, if his full capital was spent in support of the F-14D, might have been the Navy's fighter of the future.

Congress. Rep. Aspin took a big political gamble in declaring his support for Cheney and attempting to maneuver the HASC to approve the proposal without change. He challenged a Democratic House's "sacred cow" - the prerogative to fashion the DOD budget to congressional interests. His gamble almost cost him his chairmanship and forced him to become a strong advocate for a compromise that would keep the F-14D line open. The House opposition was understandably led by the Long Island delegation. Constituent politics was their interest; re-election the stake they played for.

The Grumman Lobby. In the bureaucratic politics model lobbyists are called Ad Hoc players - they mobilize and enter the arena when their special interests are threatened. Like most leading defense contractors, Grumman has a small standing army of lobbyists in Washington. One observer described them as being ruthless during the F-14D debate. The lobby was certainly innovative. It circulated copies of TOP GUN throughout congress because the movie had three stars - Tom Cruz, Kelly McGillis, and the Tomcat. Grumman was fighting for its economic survival.

IV

The F-14D Compromise-The Bureaucratic Perspective

As a prescriptive model, the bureaucratic politics paradigm is a valuable analytical tool in analyzing the decision-making process. I have previously introduced its fundamental principles, and, in this section, will use these principles to frame my analysis of the process which produced the decision to fund the F-14D. The broad question is, can the bureaucratic politics paradigm explain the dynamics of the decision-making process? The analysis will focus, however, on much narrower questions to illustrate the applicability of the model and to test my thesis that bureaucratic politics saved the Tomcat.

Were the opposing stands of the key players predictable?

Conflict between opposing interests fuels the dynamics of the decision-making process. In the F-14D controversy four countervailing interests collided: national security defense issues, service interests, domestic budget policy, and constituent politics. These issues divided the players into opposing camps with each player's stand predictable by his organization's orientation and interests - **where you stand depends on where you sit**. The players fought to achieve their biased interests: Cheney to establish his authority and control in OSD and on the Hill; the Navy to save a jealously protected weapon system; the House Long Island delegation to protect an important constituent interest. The debate was driven by organizational parochialism as one representative stated clearly, "There's nothing wrong with parochial interests. That's what we're elected for."

Why didn't Navy's leadership mount a stronger fight and exert more influence on the decision? The Navy fought Cheney's decision to cancel the F-14D during the OSD budget review, but during the congressional debate its influence was noticeably not a factor. Without a confirmed secretary, Navy's military leadership, not light-weights by any means, could not match Cheney's power. **Power is derived from organizational authority** and Cheney had it. His dressing-down of Gen. Welch, the Air Force Chief, for getting ahead of OSD on budget issues with congress was a clear warning shot across Navy's bow. The Secretary's budget became the Navy's budget when it went to the Hill.

The Navy's leadership may also have been consciously preserving their political capital, betting on the strength of the Grumman lobby to win the fight for them. And they were certainly concerned about the link between the F-14D and the future of the ATF - **hidden agendas complicate the bureaucratic process**.

Why did Chairman Aspin fail to get the HASC to approve his proposal? Many factors affected the outcome of the debate in the HASC and certainly the strength of Grumman's lobby was decisive. But the bureaucratic paradigm - **organizational positions define what players can and can not do** - supports the conclusion that Aspin's effort was doomed from the start. His proposal to have the committee essentially rubber stamp DOD's budget ran counter to the committee's traditional view that the authorization process was their opportunity to fashion the bill to meet the member's interests. Aspin's argument for "good government" over pork-barrel politics could not defeat the member's long-standing concern for constituent interests. By taking the stand that he did, Aspin almost committed political suicide. He spent the remainder of the debate rebuilding his political capital by playing a central role in fashioning a compromise that would include funding for the aircraft.

Why was Secretary Cheney's influence apparently greater in the Senate than it was in the House? Cheney is a Washington insider: a former representative, a long-time colleague of Brent Scowcroft, and a personal friend of Secretary of State Baker. He is known as a conservative, but not an ideologue. In congress he had a reputation for pragmatism and compromise. He never served on any armed services committee and was not a leading spokesman on defense issues. During the F-14D debate, Sen. Dole remarked, "Dick Cheney brings instant bipartisan support to Capitol Hill." In bureaucratic politics **players enter the game with bureaucratic baggage in tow**. The baggage can be an asset or a liability.

Cheney's influence on the debate appears to have been greater in the Senate than it was in the House. The above paradigm suggests an explanation. In dealing with the House, Cheney was returning home. His lack of a House-earned reputation on defense issues coupled with his apparent unsympathetic response to the economic argument in favor of Grumman undermined his influence among his former colleagues. In the Senate, his baggage played differently and possibly became an asset. Senators, because of

their six year term, are more insulated from constituent politics and, for them therefore, Cheney's lack of concern for Grumman's interests was less of a political rub. His greatest asset, however, may have been his reputation for compromise. The legislative link between the Senate and House is in conference committees where the ability to compromise is a political asset. I suspect the Senators remembered former representative Cheney more for his work in engineering compromises in conference committee than they did for his stands on defense issues on the House floor.

Why did the Long Island House delegation apparently have more influence than did New York's two senators? The decision to save the F-14D was finally preserved in the conference committee, but the battle was really won in the House. Representatives Hochbrueckner, Mrazek, and Downey led the Long Island delegation and the fight. Their position was made clear by Hochbrueckner when he chastised Cheney during the HASC hearings, "You are putting Grumman out of business." In bureaucratic politics, **power yields influence and organizational position and authority are the basis of an individual's power.** The three leading proponents on the issue were well placed to influence the debate; they had access and thus significant power. Rep. Hochbrueckner was on the HASC, he had both access and a vote. Rep. Mrazek was on the powerful House Appropriations Committee; he knew what it meant to have the power of the purse strings - "There are favors that have been done for members in their districts that generate good will on an issue like this. That's one of the good things about serving on Appropriations." And Rep. Downey was a long-standing supporter of Aspin who defended his mentor during the challenge to his leadership earlier in the HASC debate, and had accumulated significant political credit. "What happened was that Downey essentially delivered because Aspin owes him. The bottom line is that the planes are going in because Downey put heat on Les. It blows my mind.", stated Rep. Kasich(R-Ohio). Mine too!

Sen. D'Amato or Sen. Moynihan did not enjoy similar power or

influence in the Senate. Neither was on the Senate Armed Services Committee and, therefore, also not on the conference committee. Their only access to the debate was on the Senate floor. Sen. D'Amato vowed to fight, but was unwilling to lead a filibuster as he had done in 1986 in an attempt to save Fairchild's T-46 trainer aircraft from the budget ax. And Moynihan was less than forceful only "urging" his colleagues to reinstate the aircraft.

What role did coalitions and Ad Hoc players have in the process? Bureaucratic politics is coalition warfare. **Single players seldom have decisive power - coalitions and alliances win decisions.** The combined effort of a coalition of congressmen and the Grumman lobby got the F-14D back in the budget. Their impact was most evident in the House debate. The Long Island congressmen were successful in building a coalition that included supporters of the V-22 Osprey which was also fighting for its life. The implicit agreement was a vote for one is a vote for all. The coalition also included representatives from Virginia because support for the Tomcat meant support for naval aviation and the carriers homeported in their districts.

The lobbying effort followed a parallel course and was strategically coordinated from within Capitol Hill. The lobbying blitz was relentless in the halls of congress, in the media, and even beyond the beltway. Grumman representatives visited the commanders of both fleet air arms to solicit their support.

Surprisingly enough, the Grumman lobby was opposed by the Northrop lobby because the B-2 was becoming the congressional "cash cow" to fund the reinstated F-14D. But in the end it was the combined impact of the legislative coalition and the Grumman lobby that prevailed.

How did bureaucratic politics play in the final decision? All the model's principles are evident in both the Senate debate which produced the legislative impasse and the conference committee deliberations which produced the compromise. The Senate opposition was lead by Sen. Nunn, the preeminent defense expert

on the Hill. His personal influence alone may have been enough to spell trouble for the aircraft in the Senate, but, if it were not enough, his power as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee was. **The bureaucratic game is structured by rules and strategies.** Nunn used his power to control debate and set the rules - SASC deliberations were held behind closed doors which effectively took the Grumman lobby out of play, and he instituted a committee rule which required members to identify offsets from other programs to fund any that were added. This rule brought the influence of the White House to bear because the President wanted his strategic programs, MX, SDI, and the B-2, protected. When the SASC voted an authorization bill that did not include the F-14D the aircraft was all but dead in the Senate. The floor debate was a formality.

The F-14D was reinstated and funded by the vote of a fifty-five member conference committee, but the legislation was actually fashioned by six critical players. During the final week of debate Secretary Cheney held daily meetings with what one observer called "The Gang of Four"- Sen. Nunn, Rep. Aspin, and the ranking Republicans of the SASC and the HASC, Sen. Warner and Rep. Dickinson. **Bureaucratic politics is a process of bargaining and compromise.** Cheney and "The Gang of Four" made it happen.

V

Conclusion

Bureaucratic politics saved the F-14D. The strength of the House coalition and the Grumman lobby was decisive. When the HASC succeeded in putting the aircraft back in the budget and Cheney won his battle in the Senate the outcome was assured. All that remained to be settled was the terms of the compromise. The final decision was the product of quintessential political bargaining. When the fight was over there were no total winners and no total losers. Every major player could claim at least partial victory. Secretary Cheney got a major procurement program cancelled,

although it would take a year longer than he had planned. The Navy added eighteen aircraft to the fleet and, in the long term, strengthened its argument for the ATF. The Long Island congressmen kept the production line open, saved their constituents' jobs, and provided Grumman a soft landing from which to plan a recovery.

Critics of the decision will ask, was the national interest served by the decision? The answer, not surprisingly, depends on where you sit. Supporters of the B-2 will say no. The B-2 offsets used to fund the F-14D will delay production of the bomber and undermine the nation's strategic deterrence. Supporters for maintaining a broad military industrial base will say yes. Grumman is a national strategic asset and needs to stay in the business of producing military aircraft. The reader will have to form his own opinion and, yes, it will be dependent on where he sits. Funny how that works!